

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Peregrine Quest: From a Naturalist's Field Notebook.** By Clayton M. White. 2006. Western Sporting, Ranchester, WY U.S.A. Xxv + 390 pp., 166 color and 16 black and white photos. Appendix (common and scientific names) and Index. ISBN 978-1-888357-09-7. Hardback, \$32.95.—Dr. Clay White has opened up more than his five decades of notebooks to describe his passion for raptors, particularly the Peregrine Falcon, in this book. He has opened up his heart and soul, revealing to the reader that his naturalist tendencies run through every piece of his life. Terry Tempest Williams adds in the foreword, “What we witness within these pages are the keen observations of a scientist who dares to reflect on his own feelings, impressions, and responsibility as a human being.” More than scientist, raptor researcher, academic, Clay paints his memoirs with stories of his world travel, colleagues and falcons, and occasionally his wit. Of course, the latter is a bit reserved in this book. For those of us who know him well, we would have had more of his humor and his smile in these chapters.

Having grown up in the west, Clay dreamed in his youth about the wilderness of Alaska. Chapters 3–7 document his early graduate school experience as well as his colorful travels throughout the great land. Beginning in 1963, he managed to cross the state from the Colville River and its tributaries on the North Slope of Alaska to the outer Aleutian Islands in the extreme southwest. The projects he was involved in were as diverse as the habitats he visited: environmental assessments related to the Yukon River and Susitna River dam projects, the Trans Alaska Pipeline, Amchitka underground nuclear blasting, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. During his five decades of living in and visiting Alaska, he has been an invaluable interpreter of raptor populations and trends. In particular, along with a handful of other researchers, he helped document the precarious decline of peregrines in the Alaskan arctic and subarctic. He also witnessed the spectacular return of the peregrine to rivers he's floated and loved, including the Colville, Yukon, Tanana, and Kuskokwim rivers.

After Alaska, there are great tales of his adventures in central Asia, Australia, Brazil, and Fiji. Some of the best stories and lessons are captured in this book. Many of us won't be able to travel to all the distant lands Clay visited, but when he describes them, we feel we are there with him. For example, when Clay writes of the visit of a Tasmanian devil to some road-killed possums he had found, I feel I'm in his camp as he describes the screams of a Tasmanian devil: “when feeding at what they consider to be their carcass and then approached by another devil, any noise or phonics one could cram into the following categories of sound came from the vocal chords of a Tasmanian Devil: snort, howl, groan, grow, cough, rip, tear, spit, sneeze... (page 182).” In Kyrgyzstan, Clay brought me into the house of a shepherd where he ate “sheep stew, yogurt, and drank fermented horse milk, kimiss” (page 147). Clay helps me sense the troubled times of South America, often exacerbated by international policies of the U.S.A., as he watches “the mothers, wives, sweethearts, and children of the ‘desapardecidos’, the thousands of missing and unaccounted people from Argentina's secret political war, march in the Plaza de Mayo” (page 161).

The book also reads like a who's who in the world of raptors. Clay has touched so many people and shared his ecological, but practical, views on peregrines and other more exotic cliff-dwelling falcons such as the Gyrfalcon, Saker, and Laggard falcons. Some of those raptor experts have passed from his congregation – Walton, Emison, Burnham – but stories of all of them abound in the book. There aren't many raptor researchers Clay White hasn't touched and he graciously describes how so many have touched him as well.

If pictures are worth a thousand words, then the ample supply of photos of individual birds, different habitats, colleagues and remote villages, and notebook sketches, connects so many of his stories. My favorites include the family portraits of young falcons from four very distinctive nesting localities (across from the title page), the young, clean-shaven professor (page 26) and the bearded sourdough (page 260) posing, a tree-nesting pair of peregrines in Australia (page 179), and Clay with wife, Merle (page 306), and grandchild (page 319). Those last family pictures capture his daily philoso-